

Small Business Advocacy Council

May 29th 2007 8:30 am

Meeting minutes

Attendees:

Bud Violet

Mark Deion

Anthony Gemma

Heather Singleton

Ray Valley

Tracy Baran

Maureen Ewing

Richard Glucksman

Don Nokes

Janet Raymond

Dorothy Reynolds

Ed Mazze

Ed Greene

Ted Almon

Jerry Meyer

Gip Cabral

David Lucier

Victor Barros, Jr.

Kelly Carello

Len Tinkoff

Katharine Flynn

Sidney Goldman

Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts

Jennifer Wood

Eli Zupnick

Vladimir Ibarra

Introduction

Lt. Governor Roberts called the meeting to order at 8:40. She explained that the agenda for the meeting is extremely full, and apologized in advance at the possibility of having to push some of the agenda items to the next meeting.

She said that at the first meeting the group spoke about setting up work groups that would work on small business related issues. Two groups have already come together and have begun working on issues- the legislative work group, and the Small Business Health Coordinating Council. Lt. Governor Roberts said that at this meeting they will discuss what these groups have been working on- and talk about forming two more work groups. She also said that the group will be hearing from Rep. Ginaitt on the status of the fire code.

Legislative workgroup

Lt. Governor Roberts then introduced Senator Josh Miller to talk about the work that has been done in the legislative work group.

Senator Miller said that one of the main issues that the legislative work group has discussed is the fire code. He said that the group decided not to push for radical changes, but to advocate instead for incremental, practical amendments to the code that have the possibility of passage this session. He explained that one of the pieces of legislation that the group was going to be advocating for is an amendment that would add a small business owner to the fire code board of review.

He went on to say that another issue that the group has decided to advocate for is the SBA tax credit. He explained that the group has sent Chairman Costantino a letter expressing this view, and that the group intends to keep pushing to make sure it remains in the budget.

Senator Miller concluded by saying that the group will continue to meet after the legislative session to put together a package for the 2008 session.

Fire code

Lt. Governor Roberts then introduced Rep. Peter Ginaitt, co-chair of the House Oversight Commission to Monitor the Ramifications of the Fire Safety Code, to talk about what changes might be made to the

fire code this legislative session.

Rep. Ginaitt began by saying that he understands that the fire code is causing some issues for many small business owners. He said that while they are looking at changes, he is wary of doing anything that would punish the small business owners who have made the effort to comply with the code.

He explained that some of the areas that they are looking into making changes include: allowing for different technologies such as wireless alarms, making sure that there is adequate education for inspectors, lowering the depreciation schedule from 39 years to 5 years, looking into alternate sprinkler systems for existing structures, and giving businesses more time to come into compliance. He said that it is very important to send a signal to business that the changes made to the code are real, consistent, and that they will not benefit by holding off on compliance. He also mentioned the need to be cautious about allowing businesses to use some of the alarm systems that are not monitored by the municipalities.

Rep. Ginaitt explained that after the tragedy of the Station nightclub fire, local inspectors are fearful of interpreting the code in any way other than black or white. He says that what he is trying to do is make changes that will allow common sense to prevail in the system.

He closed by saying that he is very confident that there will be

positive changes this legislative session.

Lt. Governor Roberts added that a positive role for the Small Business Advocacy Council would be to help educate people in the private sector about the code in a way that demystifies its implementation.

Legislative update

Lt. Governor Roberts explained that the legislative update was going to be given by Dan Meuse, but due to the birth of his daughter he was unable to attend and will instead be emailing the update to the group shortly.

Small Business Health Coordinating Council

Lt. Governor Roberts began by saying that there are many different groups working on the issue of health care for small business owners and that the goal of the Small Business Health Coordinating Council is to bring these groups together and move forward on the issues important to all of them.

She explained that at the first meeting of the work group they brought around the table: The Rhode Island Business Group on Health, the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, the Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce Coalition, the SBA/RISBDC subcommittee on

health, SBANE, and the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner.

Lt. Governor Roberts said that at this first meeting each of the groups discussed the specific issues they were working on, as well as the approaches they were taking in dealing with health care for small business. She said that what the group found at the first meeting was that although there is certainly some disagreement between groups on some specific issues- there is absolute consensus that we cannot afford to do nothing.

She said that one such issue is looking at ways to attack the cost drivers in the health care system that are pushing premiums higher every year. She said that we can shift around the costs within the system, but unless we slow down its cost inflation we will keep finding ourselves in trouble. She said that in the group's discussions they came to the consensus that one important way that the state can go about doing this is through the implementation of health information technology in our state.

Lt. Governor Roberts explained that this is why at the second meeting of the council Laura Adams, CEO of the Rhode Island Quality Institute, came before the group and discussed the current status of health information technology in the state, as well as where we are going and what the small business community can do to help. Lt. Governor Roberts said that Laura did a great job explaining how dire

the need really is to move forward on this issue.

Lt. Governor Roberts concluded by saying that at the end of the second meeting the group began discussing some particular issues they can get behind to help move HIT forward, specifically related to funding. She said that at the next meeting the group will continue discussing this- and come up with a plan for our group to really push this issue along.

One member suggested that we look into ways that the SBAC can work with Ocean State Action on health care related issues, while another suggested that we bring someone in from MA to discuss how their health reform plan is going.

Other agenda items

Lt. Governor Roberts explained that due to time constraints, the final two agenda items will be continued to the next meeting agenda.

Adjourn

Lt. Governor Roberts adjourned the meeting at 9:55 am, and announced that the next meeting date will be on July 31st at 8:30 am at the EDC.